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Who lead the first return of exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem?

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Thought for 23s

Sheshbazzar (also spelled Sheshbazzar) led the first return of Jewish exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. Wikipedia

According to the Book of Ezra in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), King Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BCE and issued a decree in 538 BCE (his first year as ruler over the region) allowing the Jewish exiles to return to Judah and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4). Cyrus entrusted the sacred vessels from the Temple (looted by Nebuchadnezzar) to Sheshbazzar, described as "the prince of Judah," who then led the initial group of returnees back and oversaw their transport (Ezra 1:7–11).Gotquestions

Ezra 1 explicitly states that Sheshbazzar brought these items "along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem." He is also later credited with laying the foundations of the Temple (Ezra 5:14–16).Wikipedia

A second (or possibly overlapping/later) wave is described in Ezra 2, led more prominently by **Zerubbabel** (a descendant of King David) and the high priest Jeshua, involving about 42,360 people. Some ancient and modern interpretations debate whether Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were the same person (with Sheshbazzar as a Persian/Babylonian name), close relatives (e.g., uncle and nephew), or distinct leaders, with Zerubbabel succeeding Sheshbazzar as governor and playing a larger role in the Temple's completion under Darius I around 520–516 BCE.Etsjets

However, the biblical text in Ezra presents **Sheshbazzar as the leader of the very first return wave** under Cyrus's edict, making him the answer to who initiated the first organized return of exiles.Wikipedia

This event marks the beginning of the "Return to Zion" (or post-exilic period), though returns continued in stages over decades (later waves included those led by Ezra and Nehemiah).

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15 sources

Details on Cyrus's decreeZerubbabel's leadership role